

Rivermont pitches Great Places plan

By John Willard
QUAD-CITY TIMES

Students at Rivermont Collegiate in Bettendorf turned back the clock Wednesday to a time when their campus was the showplace of the city's leading industrialist.

Amid marble floors, intricate woodwork and frescoed ceilings, they danced, knitted and made craft items as part of a presentation to have the college preparatory school — the former Joseph W. Bettendorf mansion — designated an Iowa Great Place.

Such a designation, school officials said, would enable the continued restoration of the mansion as a historical site for business and social events and as a place to learn more about Joseph Bettendorf and his older brother, William, whose innovative designs for railroad car parts led to a manufacturing empire that provided the foundation for modern Bettendorf.

Jennifer Venema, the school's director of marketing and communications, told three mem-

bers of the Great Places Citizens Advisory Board that the 28-room English Manor-style mansion built in 1915 is especially worthy of being included as part of the Iowa Great Places initiative.

Gov. Tom Vilsack announced the program earlier this year as a way to help Iowans create innovative and culturally vibrant communities. The program would spend \$8 million in new money to help communities develop attractions or amenities that would add to the quality of life for residents.

She said short-term plans call for refurbishing the mansion's interior, replacing the elevator, making the building handicapped accessible, restoring the third-floor ballroom and recreating the original landscaping.

Long-range plans call for creating a bed and breakfast in the mansion and a restaurant in its carriage house, uses that would come after a new high school building is built, she said.

"We are excited to be able to promote the Joseph Bettendorf

Mansion on the campus of Rivermont Collegiate through the Iowa Great Places program. This program will allow us to restore and share the beauty and historic significance of the mansion with the people of Iowa and the many visitors that come to our great state," Venema said.

Bettendorf Mayor Mike Freemire said the plans to restore the mansion fit in well with the Iowa Great Places program, noting that the city's strategic location on the Mississippi River and Interstate 74 makes it a gateway to Iowa.

Gil D. Spence, leisure services manager for the City of Dubuque and a member of the Great Places Citizens Advisory Board, said 73 presentations are being made to the board. The three projects selected will be announced Oct. 11 in Iowa City, he said.

John Willard can be contacted at (563) 383-2314 or jwillard@qctimes.com.

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From Page:
3
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Members of the Iowa Great Places program observe Rivermont Collegiate music instructor Laura Hesse as she plays the piano for student dancers Cryssy Mayfield and John Sullivan in the music room of the former Joseph Bettendorf mansion, while they tour the school.